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FILE DESIGNATION

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HANDLING INDICATOR

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NO.

TO : Department of State

INFO: CARACAS, USCINCSO (POLAD & J-2), CALI, MEDELLIN

FROM : Amembassy BOGOTA

E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, CO VE

SUBJECT: Venezuelan Troops Occupy their Lands, Claim
Colombian Peasants

REFERENCE: Bogota's 6513

The reporting officer addressed a national meeting of leaders of the Federation of Agrarian Workers of Colombia (FESTRACOL-CTC) on March 1. During the informal exchange which followed, a campesino leader from the Guajira expressed his grave concern over occupation of his people's lands by the Venezuelan military.

According to the campesino leader, Juan Aguirre, Venezuelan troops have occupied lands which the campesinos have cultivated since moving their from Santander in 1949. The area in question is east of Fonseca, Guajira, between the towns of Conejo, San Pedro, and La Carúa and the Venezuelan border. The approximate coordinates are 10°50' N by 72°40' W. Aguirre claimed that some 80 Venezuelan troops remain in a church and a school built by the campesinos. From these improvised barracks the troops have foraged for meat and have destroyed crops to clear land for helipads.

Enclosed is a free translation of a letter which FESTRACOL recently sent to President Pastrana and other competent Colombian authorities.

Comment: Aguirre impressed the reporting officer as a rational individual and one unlikely to have confused or fabricated his account. Colombian authorities could

POST ROUTING

TO:	Action	Info.	Initials
AMB/PO		X	
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ECON		X	
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AID		X	
USIS		X	
DAO		X	
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FORM 10-64 DS-323

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Drafted by:

POL: REOlson: flw

Drafting Date:

3/5/73

Phone No.:

Contents and Classification Approved by:

POL - Thomas F. Killoran

Clearances:

DAO:Col. Vail (substance)

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Bogota

check this alleged invasion as there is a Colombian cavalry unit just a few kilometers north of Fonseca. However, a visit to the Fonseca area by Colombian congressmen checking similar reports in September 1972 (see reftel) led to a brief flurry in the press but to no change in the situation. It may well be that authorities are willing to accept the status quo for the time being.

SACCIO

Enclosure: *Ag*
Translation of letter from
FESTRACOL to President Pastrana

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Enclosure to Bogota's A-47

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION

Union of Agricultural Workers of Fonseca, Guajira
(in process of formation)

Fonseca, Guajira
February 24, 1973

Dr. Misael Pastrana Borrero
President of the Republic
Bolivar House

Mr. President:

Please accept from our campesino organization our warmest greetings and our desires for success in your office. This letter is to present to you the following denunciation:

Campesinos organized along the Colombian-Venezuelan border direct themselves to you with the sole objective of asking your valuable assistance in a conflict with our brother country, Venezuela, along the border between the forest and the mountain and along the line over the Guasare River. In 1949, the first settlers entered that area to clear the mountains to help build the nation and become useful to society, lending a social and economic service to the peoples of the Department of the Guajira and contributing financially to the Government of Colombia.

In spite of our intentions to serve, today we find ourselves in the dilemma of the border conflict provoked by the present administration of the Republic of Venezuela--and this after 800 Colombian campesinos have been in the area so many years, working peacefully on plots now in full production with such crops as platanos, sugar cane, cacao, coffee and various varieties of fruit trees. During our stay in these mountains, separated completely from civilization because of distance and the lack of access roads, we have, through our own efforts and self-imposed privations, built a local school through which have passed more than 1,000 children of campesinos.

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Now this school has been converted into a barracks of the Venezuelan Army and from it there comes machine gun fire, some at random and some aimed at our pigs, thus to take our animals for their use. Similarly, they have taken domestic fowls and seized foodstuffs purchased by campesinos in the closest Colombian towns. Likewise, they have destroyed our crops to construct landing fields for helicopters. We have not received indemnization for these damages in spite of a visit by Colombian Congressmen and some officials of the Government of Venezuela.

These campesinos continue to be victims of mistreatment, physical persecution and panic sowed by these troops with firearms which they shoot almost daily with the evil intention of driving the campesinos off the land. The only patrimony of these people is the work they have invested over many years in order to exist in the midst of the many social and economic difficulties suffered by humble families without resources as a consequence of this state of affairs.

There being no other matter, we remain, yours truly,

For the Executive Committee

Marceliano Ramos
Provisional President

Victor Saurit
Provisional Fiscal

Felipe Fugueroa
Provisional
Secretary General

Juan Aguirre Rivera
Union Advisor

cc: FESTRACOL, press, radio, Ministries of Foreign Relations,
Labor and Agriculture and federations of FESTRACOL

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